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ABSTRACT

What reading consultants do varies considerably from person to person as there is variability in the role each reading consultant perceives as his or her responsibility. To assist reading consultants in prioritizing their roles to meet their constituents' needs, 113 elementary teachers enrolled in graduate reading classes at the University of Central Florida were asked their opinions concerning the roles and functions of reading consultants and/or supervisors. Teachers were given a five-part semantic differential rating scale and asked to rate 30 activities individually according to how strongly they felt the reading consultant would be aiding them in their teaching by providing expert assistance. For purpose of analysis, the 30 separate activities were grouped into three categories: (1) functions of the specialist concerned with direct classroom instructional assistance; (2) activities of an inservice training nature; and (3) the consultant in the role of administrator. Analysis revealed that there were two clusters regarding functions and activities of the reading specialist: prime functions and secondary functions. Some of the prime functions included: be available to teachers for conferences and direct assistance; help teachers adapt their materials and procedures to prescriptive teaching; and conduct inservice workshops. Some of the secondary functions included: assist teachers in developing classroom reading centers; serve as a resource person to teachers for teaching materials; and coordinate the development of a system-wide curriculum guide. (Three tables of data are included, and 18 references are appended.) (MS)

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PRIORITIZING READING CONSULTANTS' ROLES

IN CENTRAL FLORIDA

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ABSTRACT

A needs assessment was conducted in Central Florida to ascertain what functions elementary teachers would like reading consultants to perform for them. Teachers were asked to respond to an opinionnaire consisting of thirty consultant activities. These activities were categorized into three principal categories of classroom assistance, inservice training, and administrative roles.

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Prioritizing Reading Consultants' Roles in Central Florida

What Reading Consultants (RCs) do varies considerably from person to person as there is variability in the role each reading consultant perceives as her responsibility. Because of ambiguities in perceptions of what help teachers want, the reading consultant must choose which functions are most needed. She must assess and evaluate what help teachers want, and even than she sometimes appears to be undiscerning about which services teachers appreciate more than others. She can not please all the people all the time, but she can please more people by being tuned into their needs. In addition, RCs are given administrative tasks which distract them from being fully engaged in instructional endeavors. Essentially, RCs have a common problem with others who perform many roles and who answer to more than one constituency: it is the concept of targeting and meeting peoples' needs with a limited amount of time. Assisting RCs in prioritizing their roles to meet their constituents' needs is the purpose of this article.

Administrative and supervisory school system personnel provide a number of services to reading teachers. These people have a variety of titles such as coordinator, assistant superintendent, consultant, or supervisor. This discussion is for those, regardless of title, who perform the functions of a Reading Consultant. The term consultant rather than coordinator or supervisor is a conscious choice because of the connotation that a consultant is a person with specialized knowledge who is willing to be helpful.

BACKGROUND PERSPECTIVE

Knight (1930) and Robinson & Rauch (1965) addressed the issue of the RC's functions. They viewed the RC as a resource person, an inservice leader, a research investigator, a diagnostician, an instructor, and evaluator. The consultant's tasks were mentioned as visiting and establishing good rapport with classroom teachers, planning and demonstrating reading techniques, testing and interpreting test scores, providing materials and information, introducing current periodicals, retesting children, and consulting with parents and teachers, and solving problems. Others since then have affirmed these roles (Sister Josephine, 1965; Rockwell, 1976; Kossack, 1976; Burg, Kaufman, Korngold & Kovner, 1978; and Tutolo, 1987). All stressed that the development of the RCs rapport with the whole school staff was the paramount function, for without rapport, nothing could be accomplished.

The job of the RC has undergone many changes from the duties that the consultant performed when the position originated. At first the consultant helped students who were below their reading expectancy levels, and she was considered another special area teacher. Tutolo (1987) notes that the RCs role has shifted from teaching students to aiding teachers. Today the RCs duties are more numerous than ever before as teachers rely upon consultants to assist in many different ways. If a Reading Consultant is to be successful, the role must be clarified, understood, and agreed upon. To further define consultant functions is a continuous need.

PRIOR STUDIES

Boeholt (1987) was interested in identifying the ideal RC. She compared perceptions of four groups involved with reading supervisors, and identified characteristics that define the ideal University of Oregon Reading Endorsement Supervisor. The five categories were; imparting knowledge, communication skills, evaluation skills, procedural techniques, and personal/professional traits. To have a wide knowledge of teaching methods was considered essential by all groups. Expectations were being met or exceeded in the categories of evaluation skills, communication skills, and imparting knowledge.

Bean & Eichelberger (1985) compared the responses of teachers and reading specialists regarding the changes in roles and activities of the RC to a pull-out program. Three functions changed in an in-class setting. There was less emphasis on both diagnosis and teaching specific skills and more emphasis on working with content teachers. When ranking reading specialists' functions in terms of relative importance, four of the five highly valued functions were student centered, with one resource-role function listed. Overall, Bean & Eichelberger (1985) found that both teachers and specialists held similar views about the value of the various functions of reading specialists.

Pikulski & Ross (1979) reported 432 classroom teachers in Pennsylvania public schools seemed to expect the RC to spend the majority of her time working directly with students; however, Bean (1979) cited A Right-to-Read study in which teachers perceived that the specialist had the greatest impact as a resource person, with inservice planning and teacher conferences rating second and third preferences.

Storer (1970), Ahern (1974), Jurata (1975), Thompson, (1980) and Keonke (1981) related that the RCs responsibilities require her to deal mostly with teachers, administrators, and the public through the use of individual conferences, reading workshops or as a general source of information. The essence is that once dealing mainly with students, the consultant now has personal contact mostly with teachers and administrators; and through these relationships, the consultant is able to reach more students than if she worked directly with them.

A study by Rupley, Mason & Togan (1985) was designed to involve public school administrators, reading teachers, and professors of reading in a survey of past, present, and anticipated future roles of reading resource teachers. Results indicate general areas of agreement and disagreement among these groups; however, perceptions of the future role of reading specialists very nearly agree. The majority of diagnostic, inservice, and instructional functions will be performed more frequently by reading specialists.

Reading resource specialists (RRS) in Florida are being utilized to improve reading in the content areas. This is a voluntary program on the part of content teachers. Eighty-five percent of the administrators and teachers that were surveyed by Woods & Topping (1986) thought that the RRS had been instrumental in improving students' reading skills in the content areas. The majority of the content teachers rated the reading resource specialists as very helpful in conducting inservice

training, determining students' reading levels, preparing study guides, conducting class presentations, and providing diagnostic testing. The investigators also state that one advantage of having a school based RRS free of class responsibilities is that she is able to provide reading inservice for the staff.

In summary, previous research has demonstrated the need for an effort to clarify the dimensions of the RC's functions from the teachers' perspectives. The role-definition should also reflect the expansion and restructuring of the consultant's professional activities resulting from demands within the educational area to make optimum and efficient use of the reading consultant's knowledge and experiences. While previous investigations of national and regional scope have been valuable in providing direction to RCs, a continual updating of teachers' perceptions is necessary. In this context, a nonsystematic study of Central Florida teachers was initiated.

The Central Florida Study

One hundred thirteen elementary teachers enrolled in graduate reading classes at the University of Central Florida with classes in Orange, Brevard, Osceola, Lake and Volusia counties were asked their opinions concerning the roles and functions of reading consultants and/or supervisors. Given a five part semantic differential rating scale, teachers were asked to rate individually thirty activities according to how strongly they felt the reading consultant would be aiding them in their teaching by providing expert assistance.

For purpose of analysis, the thirty separate activities were grouped into three general categories: 1) functions of the specialist concerned with direct classroom instructional assistance, 2) activities of an inservice training nature, and 3) the consultant in the role of administrator. Survey item designation to each category was arbitrarily assigned by the investigator. Within each of the general areas, items were rank-ordered according to the cumulative percentages of the teachers responses, with strongly agree and agree being combined.

After careful scrutiny, two clusters regarding functions and activities of the reading specialist surfaced: prime functions and secondary functions. Item assignment to prime or secondary clusters was conducted according to the investigator's criteria based on a percentage score cut-off. Designated to prime functions were items with cumulative frequences at or greater than ($\geq$) 75%. Secondary functions were those statements with cumulative frequences at or less than ($\leq$) 74%.

The tables below show specific cluster breakdown of opinionnaire statements used to assess the sample's expectations of the consultants' roles and duties in each of the three major areas. In addition, the cumulative frequency percentages are given for every item.

Findings

Direct Instructional Assistance

Under the category of Direct Instructional Assistance, Table 1 contains ten items that met the PRIME FUNCTION criteria (cf$\geq$75%) and eight items that met the SECONDARY FUNCTION criteria ($\leq$74%).

TABLE 1
DIRECT INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANCE

PRIME FUNCTIONS
cf $\geq$ 75%

BE AVAILABLE TO TEACHERS FOR CONFERENCES & DIRECT ASSISTANCE	95%
ASSIST TEACHERS IN PROVIDING FOR POOR READERS	92%
MAKE SUGGESTIONS TO HELP READING TEACHERS IMPROVE THEIR PROCEDURES	88%
PROVIDE ASSISTANCE IN DIAGNOSING STUDENTS' READING PROBLEMS	88%
HELP TEACHERS WITH INTERPRETING TEST RESULTS	85%

Secondary functions (cf $\geq$ 84% $\leq$ 50%) include 9 items as illustrated in Table 1.

SECONDARY FUNCTIONS
cf $\leq$ 74%

ASSIST TEACHERS IN DEVELOPING CLASSROOM READING CENTERS	66%
ASSIST TEACHERS IN ADMINISTERING STANDARDIZED & INFORMAL DIAGNOSTIC INSTRUMENTS	61%
BE AVAILABLE TO TEACHERS FOR PARENT CONFERENCES	58%
TAKE OVER CLASSES PERMITTING TEACHER TO OBSERVE OTHER READING TEACHERS	55%

The prioritizing of the 14 Direct Instructional Assistance items indicates a percentage range from a high of 95% (strongly agree and agree combined) to the low of 55%, a rather wide percentage range and indicative that the semantic differentials were operative. Ten items fell in the Prime Function category ($\geq$ 75%) and four in the Secondary Category ($\leq$ 74%). It appears that the RC should consider the Prime Function items in the Direct Instructional Assistance as being priority with the elementary teachers in the Central Florida area.

Inservice Training Assistance

The second general area, consisted of nine statements to which teachers assessed the degree they felt consultant assistance would be beneficial. The opinionnaire items arbitrarily assigned are included in Table 2 according to cluster breakdown of items pertaining to inservice training duties of the reading consultant.

TABLE 2

INSERVICE TRAINING ASSISTANCE

PRIME FUNCTIONS
cf $\geq$ 75%

HELP TEACHERS ADAPT THEIR MATERIALS AND PROCEDURES TO PRESCRIPTIVE TEACHING.	86%
CONDUCT INSERVICE WORKSHOPS	84%
ACQUAINT TEACHERS WITH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE FROM READING ORGANIZATIONS	79%
KEEP TEACHERS INFORMED REGARDING LATEST EDUCATIONAL EQUIPMENT DEVELOPMENTS, SUCH AS COMPUTERS	76%

SECONDARY FUNCTIONS
cf $\leq$ 74%

HELP TEACHERS COORDINATE MANAGEMENT OF A READING SKILLS SYSTEM SO THAT TEACHERS WILL KNOW THEIR PRECISE SKILL NEEDS OF EACH STUDENT	73%
SPONSOR A READING MATERIAL BANK AND EXCHANGE AMONG TEACHERS	67%
HELP TEACHERS USE COMPUTER-ASSISTED INSTRUCTION AND COMPUTER-MANAGED INFORMATION SYSTEMS	66%
INITIATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROUP PROBLEM-SHARING SESSIONS	65%
HELP TEACHERS DETERMINE THE READING DIFFICULTY LEVELS OF TEXTBOOKS AND RESOURCE MATERIALS	61%

In the Inservice Training Assistance area, four of the nine opinionnaire statements elicited agreeable responses of $\geq$ 75% from the surveyed teachers. Five statements fell in the Secondary Function category ($\leq$ 74%).

Administrative Duties

Table 3 depicts teacher assessment of the consultant's administrative roles and responsibilities. Teachers failed to rank any of the Administrative items as prime functions ($\geq$ 75%). The seven items fell under the Prime Function criterion, and were classified as secondary functions.

TABLE 3

ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES

PRIME FUNCTIONS

cf $\geq$ 75%

NO ITEMS IN THIS AREA COULD BE ASSIGNED TO PRIME FUNCTIONS

SECONDARY FUNCTIONS

cf $\leq$ 74%

SERVE AS A RESOURCE PERSON TO TEACHERS FOR TEACHING MATERIALS, COMMUNITY MEDICAL HELP, PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING, SPECIAL EDUCATION FACILITIES, COMMERCIAL & NON-PROFIT TUTORIAL CENTERS	72%
COORDINATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SYSTEM-WIDE CURRICULUM GUIDE	70%
ACQUAINT TEACHERS WITH UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS AND COURSES AVAILABLE FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	63%
PROVIDING CONSULTING SERVICES TO PARENTS CONCERNING SPECIAL TESTING SERVICES AND TEST INTERPRETATION	63%
MAINTAIN AND CIRCULATE A PROFESSIONAL LIBRARY	59%
PROPOSE A BUDGET FOR READING MATERIALS	51%
SELECT BASAL MATERIALS FOR READING TEACHERS TO USE	39%

Administrative duties of budgeting and basal reader selection were the lowest rated functions. In general, Administrative Functions were not rated as highly as Direct Instructional Assistance and Inservice Training Assistance, but these results might be due to teachers having fewer insights into administrative functions than the instructional areas with which they are more familiar.

Conclusion

Serious consideration should be given to the services teachers want from reading consultants since accommodating teacher needs is the single most important consultant function. With this notion in mind, a consultant needs to employ a systemized approach to prioritizing and delivering services. A sensible method would be to look at the three categories of questions in descending order and prioritize things to do. However, in addition to this procedure, the consultant's own antennae should be relied upon for perceptions gleaned from the environment such as interaction with students, teachers, administrators and the public. These perceptions, when brought together and digested, will suggest other roles to be filled very much as important as generated by a formal needs assessment. Intuitive judgement is important and should be acted upon. In a word, common sense should prevail!

A consultant is an artist who must act in part from inner direction to promote positive changes in school reading programs. All the needs assessments and data cumulating activities will be for naught if the RC fails to establish rapport with the whole school staff.

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